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ABSTRACT

This Digest describes the development of the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress for civics, and the results from that examination of civic knowledge and intellectual skills of students in grades four, eight, and twelve. The assessment format utilized multiple-choice and constructed-response questions. Results were reported by the achievement levels of basic (46% of students at grade four, 48% of students at grade eight, and 39% of students at grade twelve), proficient (21% of students at grade four, 21% of students at grade eight, and 22% of students at grade twelve), and advanced (2% of students at grade four, 2% of students at grade eight, and 4% at grade twelve). NAEP Civics performances also revealed that: (1) at all grades students identified as white or Asian/Pacific Islander tended to have higher test scores than those identified as black or Hispanic; (2) the higher the level of formal education students' parents had attained, the better the students performed on this assessment; (3) students in nonpublic schools tended to score higher than students in public schools, with those in Catholic schools reaching even higher levels of achievement; and (4) students who qualified for the federally funded free or reduced-price school lunch program tended to score lower than students not eligible for this program. (LB)

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The National Assessment of Educational Progress in Civics

By John J. Patrick

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), an ongoing, congressionally-mandated project, collects and reports data on the educational achievement of American students in core subjects of the school curriculum. The first NAEP in citizenship was conducted in 1969. Other NAEPs involving citizenship and social studies were administered in 1971, 1975, and 1981. In 1988, there was a NAEP in civics and government (Anderson and Others 1990). This Digest discusses the framework, assessment procedures, and findings of the 1998 NAEP in civics.

The Framework. The *National Standards for Civics and Government* (Quigley and Others 1994) guided development of the framework for the 1998 NAEP in civics (NAEP Civics Consensus Project 1996). All facets of this national assessment, from construction of test items to interpretation of results, were conducted in terms of the framework, which includes the three interconnected components of civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic dispositions.

The civic knowledge component is based on five fundamental questions that denote ideas and information essential to the citizen's comprehension of democracy in the United States:

- What are civic life, politics, and government?
- What are the foundations of the American political system?
- How does the government established by the Constitution embody the purposes, values, and principles of American democracy?
- What is the relationship of the United States to other nations and to world affairs?
- What are the roles of citizens in American democracy?

The civic skills component refers to intellectual and participatory abilities that enable citizens to use knowledge to respond effectively and responsibly to the challenges of political and civic life in a democracy. The civic dispositions pertain to traits of character and habits of participation by which citizens may promote the common good in a democracy.

In accordance with federal government policy, the NAEP in civics directly tests only the knowledge and intellectual skills components of the framework; however, it is important to note that civic knowledge and intellectual skills in combination with participatory skills and civic dispositions constitute a complete conceptualization of civic education presented in the framework, which is a model for curriculum development and instruction in schools.

The Assessment Procedures. Test items for the 1998 NAEP in civics were developed to measure the knowledge and intellectual skills components of the framework. Because it was not possible to test students' actual civic participation and dispositions, items were included to test instead students' ability to identify and comprehend the purposes and effective applications of participatory skills and civic dispositions. Most test items were multiple-choice. There were, however, both "short constructed response" items and "extended constructed response" items, which required students to write their answers to questions.

Three levels of achievement—*basic, proficient,* and *advanced*—specify the expectations of student performance in civics at grades four, eight, and twelve. The *basic* level represents partial mastery of knowledge and intellectual skills in the framework that are prerequisites for competence in civics. The *proficient* level designates fully competent performance in terms of the civics framework. The *advanced* level signifies superior achievement in civics.

Respondents in the 1998 NAEP in civics were identified through selection of nationally representative samples of students in public and private schools at grades four, eight, and twelve. The assessed sample sizes at each grade level were 5,948 at grade four, 8,212 at grade eight, and 7,763 at grade twelve.

Students were asked to respond to civics assessment items and questionnaires about personal characteristics and experiences presumably related to achievement in civics. Teachers of the student respondents were asked to complete questionnaires about curricular content and classroom practices.

The Findings. The basic level of achievement was attained by 46% of students at grade four, 48% at grade eight, and 39% at grade twelve. The proficient level was reached by 21% of students at grade four, 21% at grade eight, and 22% at grade twelve. The advanced level was achieved by 2% of students at grade four, 2% at grade eight, and 4% at grade twelve.

Another way to look at the overall findings is to note that 31% of the fourth-grade students were below the basic level of achievement and 69% were above it; at grade eight, 29% were below and 71% were above the basic level; and at grade twelve, 35% were below and 65% were above the basic level.

John J. Patrick is Director of the ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, Director of the Social Studies Development Center, and Professor of Education at Indiana University. He was a member of the Planning Committee, NAEP Civics Consensus Project, which developed the framework for the 1998 NAEP in civics. He also participated in the development of test items and achievement level descriptions for the 1998 NAEP in civics.

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Performances on the 1998 NAEP in civics varied significantly according to certain group identities or memberships. At all grades, for example, students identified as white or Asian/Pacific Islander tended to have higher test scores than those identified as black or Hispanic. In general, the higher the level of formal education students' parents had attained, the better the students performed on this assessment. And at all three grades, students in nonpublic schools tended to score higher than students in public schools. Further, among the nonpublic school students, those in Catholic schools tended to reach higher levels of achievement. At all three grade levels, students who qualified for the federally funded free or reduced-price school lunch program tended to score lower on this civics assessment than students not eligible for this program. This finding suggests there may be a general relationship between lower socioeconomic status and lower performances in civics.

Performances in this civics assessment were related to variations in particular home and school experiences of students, as revealed in responses to student and teacher questionnaires. For example, regular discussion of school work at home was related to higher performance on this civics assessment. Students in grade twelve who volunteered in their communities tended to have higher civics scores than those who never volunteered. Students in grades four and eight who were regularly involved in group activities or projects tended to outscore those who rarely or never participated in this kind of classroom assignment. Finally, there was a relationship between using the Internet in school for civics assignments and higher achievement on this assessment.

Information in this Digest on the assessment procedures and findings of the 1998 NAEP in Civics was taken from the *NAEP 1998 Civics Report Card for the Nation*. For information on how to order this or any other NAEP Publication, write: U.S. Department of Education (ED Pubs); P.O. Box 1398; Jessup, MD 20794-1398 or call toll free: 1-877-4ED PUBS. You may also visit NAEP on the World Wide Web: <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>.

References and ERIC Resources. The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia 22153-2852; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1400 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most larger libraries by using the bibliographic information provided, requested through Interlibrary Loan, or ordered from commercial reprint services.

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